

ABM Move Called 'Major Blunder'

By George C. Wilson
Washington Post Staff Writer

NEW YORK, Nov. 19—President Johnson's decision to build a missile defense was "the major blunder of his Administration," second only to his escalation of the Vietnam war, Sen. George S. McGovern (D-S.D.) charged tonight.

McGovern—a leading Senate dove just elected to another term—predicted the anti-ballistic-missile (ABM) will cost the Nation \$50 billion instead of the advertised \$5 billion.

He said President-elect Nixon "could perform a major service to the American people" if he called off the ABM—a step Nixon has shown no inclination to take.

McGovern participated in an ABM debate sponsored by the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions.

The discussion, first since the presidential election, marks the resumption of the drive to halt the Sentinel ABM system now under construction.

The focus is expected to shift to the Senate early next year. Sen. John Sherman Cooper (R-Ky.) hopes to question witnesses on the technical shortcomings of the system in a special hearing that had been promised by Richard B. Russell (D-Ga.), when he was chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Dr. Jerome Wiesner, former science adviser to President

Kennedy, concentrated on the ABM's technical problems during the panel discussion tonight.

Wiesner said that "the defense is playing a losing game" because offensive weapons can be varied to foil an ABM system. He said the ABM now under construction does not make "common sense."

As for the Johnson Administration's portrayal of the Sentinel ABM as a safeguard against an irrational attack by Red China, Wiesner scoffed that "this was a bad joke perpetrated by Mr. Johnson and Secretary McNamara in an election year."

During his critique of the ABM, Wiesner disclosed that the U.S. would rely heavily on what he called "X-ray kill" to destroy an incoming enemy warhead. The X-rays would come from the explosion of the defending missile's nuclear warhead.

Under the Nike Zeus system, discarded in favor of the Sentinel ABM, the defending missiles relied most heavily on neutrons penetrating inside of the enemy warhead. But Wiesner said this required so many defending missiles—because the neutrons did not travel very far—that the Pentagon put more emphasis on the X-ray kill technique.

Two panelists who argued in favor of the ABM were retired Air Force Gen. Leon W. Johnson, former head of the Continental Air Command, and Dr. Donald G. Brennan of the Hudson Institute.

Johnson said the United

States must be prepared militarily across the board. Our military posture cannot be complete until a defense against missiles is established, he said.

Brennan argued that defensive missile systems had advanced to the point where it is not certain offensive missiles would get through them.

Strong Speech

The panel discussion was shared by Justice William O. Douglas of the Supreme Court. He made a strong speech of his own in introducing the ABM subject.

His main theme was that only "the rule of law" not "the rule of force"—can save "the species now confronted with the stark prospect of obliteration."

The Justice said "the old preoccupation with ideas of national power and supremacy are more than antiquated... the ticking of the H-bomb should make us hurry to escape the paralysis of the political bankruptcy which seems to have overtaken us."

He said that in today's cold war—"a bilateral state of mind arranged by Stalin and Truman" the best brains in the United States have concentrated "on many false targets."

One result of this, Douglas said, is the Johnson Administration decision to go ahead with an anti-ballistic missile defense—a decision announced by former Defense Secretary McNamara on Sept. 18, 1967, and under attack ever since.

"My lay judgment," Douglas

said, "is that the manufacture of these systems of missile defense will make the military-industrial complex rich, will result in the production of huge piles of junk and will be meaningless in terms of survival."